



Stratagem
Lobbying for the Future

Findings of a Survey of MLAs Conducted on behalf of The Probation Board for Northern Ireland

December 2010

**“One-fifth of the people are against everything all of the time”
(Robert Kennedy 1925-1968 US Democrat politician)**





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The principal objective of the research was to gain an insight into local political thought about the work of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI)

ComRes and Stratagem surveyed MLAs across Northern Ireland between 18th October and 7th December 2010 by self-completion online and postal questionnaire. The full questionnaire consisted of 41 questions from a range of organisations. Included were two questions submitted by the PBNI.

Membership of the MLA Research Panel includes:

- All community designations (nationalist, unionist and other)
- All main political parties represented in the Assembly
- All 18 constituencies
- Party Leaders
- MLAs who are also MPs
- MLAs who are also Peers
- Men and women ranging in age from mid-20s to mid-70s

In total, **41 MLAs** completed the questionnaire anonymously. This consisted of 18 MLAs completing an online version; 23 completed the hard copy postal questionnaire. Data is weighted to reflect the exact composition of the Assembly in terms of party representation and constituency distribution.

For the purposes of our work we divided the 18 constituencies into three regions which are listed below.

Region 1 - Belfast East, Belfast North, Belfast South, Belfast West, Lagan Valley and Strangford

Region 2 - East Antrim, North Antrim, South Antrim, North Down, South Down, Upper Bann

Region 3 - Foyle, Mid Ulster, East Londonderry, Newry & Armagh, West Tyrone, Fermanagh & South Tyrone

Stratagem and ComRes jointly run the MLA Research Panel. Stratagem provides the local political expertise and ensures the Panel membership remains high. ComRes collates and processes the statistical data, on which Stratagem writes an interpretative report.

Our MLA Research Panel is conducted with our partner ComRes. All work is undertaken in accordance with British Polling Council (www.britishpollingcouncil.org) rules and is conducted strictly in keeping with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Note: Any press releases or other publications relating to results of the MLA Research Panel or this report must be checked with Stratagem before use. Stratagem requires 48 hours to check a press release unless otherwise agreed.



As we say goodbye to 2010, we look forward to the completion in 2011 of the first full term of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Whilst previous terms were interrupted by political disagreement or sensational scandals, our MLAs managed to navigate through the political landscape and emerge at the other side (largely) unscathed –for many though it wasn't an easy ride.

Early in 2010 we experienced the media frenzy surrounding Iris Robinson when news emerged of her extra marital affair. This was then followed by allegations of impropriety by First Minister Peter Robinson in relation to the sale of some property. Then in what might have been the biggest political shock of 2010 Peter Robinson lost his seat at Westminster to Alliance's Naomi Long, giving the party an historic first seat in the House of Commons. Many thought in the first few months of 2010 that Peter Robinson would lose his firm grasp on the DUP however he fought back hard for his political survival and kept his position as party leader.

Meanwhile, Gerry Adams survived personal scandal and accusations levied at him suggesting that he had covered up, or failed to take action against his brother Liam after it emerged that he was suspected of sexual abuse. Martin McGuinness too had to handle allegations that he had prior knowledge of the IRA's Claudy bombing in 1972 however he managed to minimise the effect it had on him and his party.

There were new party leaders in 2010 for both the UUP and the SDLP. Margaret Ritchie replaced Mark Durkan who had led the party for eight years, beating Alasdair McDonnell after a lively four month contest. The UUP's Tom Elliott and Basil McCrea battled for the job as UUP leader as former leader Sir Reg Empey headed to the House of Lords. The party rather predictably decided that the younger, more liberal Basil McCrea was too much of a risk and opted for Tom Elliott.

The UUP had a bad year at the polls too. Its electoral alliance with the Conservative Party saw its only remaining MP, Lady Sylvia Hermon part company with the party. In the Westminster election itself, the link up, dubbed (UCU-NF) failed to win a single seat in Northern Ireland and Unionist unity candidate Rodney Connor was beaten too by Sinn Féin's Michelle Gildernew by just a handful of votes, a result that a legal challenge was unable to overturn.

More recently, there has been something of an exodus from the UUP as some on the more liberal side of the party have aired their discomfort with the new leadership, with Tom Elliott's decision to keep the link with the Conservative Party and overlooking some in the selection process for the Assembly Election in May 2011. The party lost Alan McFarland MLA shortly after Sylvia Hermon MP, followed by former candidates Harry Hamilton and Trevor Ringland. Paula Bradshaw, former candidate for Belfast South ditched the UUP and has been accepted into the Alliance Party. The most recent departure is David McClarty who resigned after being deselected by his constituency association in September last year.

With an election in the spring what will become of unionist unity? While Tom Elliott tells us all that he isn't a "*political dinosaur*", Peter Robinson in quite a radical move called for more integrated education. Was this an attempt to reach to UUP voters?

Gerry Adams made a move of a different kind - jumping across the border to fight the next General Election in the Republic of Ireland as a candidate in the Louth constituency. Some have heralded the move as a shrewd attempt to help Sinn Féin

deliver the electoral gains that they have long promised in the Dáil but thus far have been unable to achieve.

Gains of that nature now seem possible, with or without Adams, as the main Government party in the Republic of Ireland; Fianna Fáil is currently at their lowest ebb in opinion polls. The sharp drop in confidence comes on the back of mass protests and disgruntlement at the Government's signing of a deeply unpopular bailout agreement with the IMF and EU in a move to alleviate some of the financial uncertainty that the country is facing as a result of the credit crunch and banking sector problems, problems which many feel Fianna Fáil have a lot to answer for.

The Northern Ireland Executive recently released a draft budget for the next Assembly period (four years) which whilst unpopular for its inevitable cuts, is not as harsh as many were expecting, however the devil will be in the detail, which is still to emerge.

Sinn Féin faced criticism for attacking dramatic cuts in the south where it is in opposition, while preparing to axe funding north of the border. With traditionally weak credentials in economic policy reported by many, and a number of elections looming north and south, Sinn Féin is keen to show its voters (especially in the south) that it can be in Government and deliver an innovative budget.

A busy year lies ahead with Assembly and Local Government Election as well as a Referendum on the voting system for Westminster. An election in the Republic of Ireland is also likely to take place in March. As if that wasn't enough to keep us busy we will also have a new Assembly to look forward to and a number of new faces entering the political fray. However as some of the parties change their minds on their commitment of double-jobbing we might also see a few old faces back at Stormont.



- MLAs have a broad understanding of the work of the probation services in Northern Ireland and use a broad range of language to describe it. MLAs commonly associate the role of the probation service with the prevention of reoffending, the rehabilitation of offenders and the protection of the public;
- A majority of MLAs (57%) feel the PBNI is 'effective' at delivering services in Northern Ireland;
- A small proportion of MLAs (8%) regard the PBNI as 'not effective at delivering services in Northern Ireland';
- A significant proportion of MLAs (36%) express 'no opinion' on the effectiveness or otherwise of the PBNI at delivering services in Northern Ireland;
- Unionist MLAs (65%) are more likely to consider the PBNI 'effective' at delivering services in Northern Ireland than nationalist MLAs (41%);
- A majority of MLAs from the DUP, the SDLP and the Alliance Party think that the PBNI is 'effective' at delivering services in Northern Ireland;
- A considerable percentage of Sinn Féin MLAs (65%) have no opinion on whether the PBNI is an effective organisation or not;
- The PBNI is more likely to be considered by MLAs as 'effective' than the Criminal Justice Inspectorate, the Public Prosecution Service, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Youth Justice Agency and NIACRO;
- Over the past two years the proportion of MLAs rating the PBNI as 'effective' rose by 15% (from 42% to 57%). This is a greater rise than any of the other organisations in the criminal justice sector surveyed;
- Over the past two years the proportion of MLAs rating the PBNI as 'not effective' fell by 10% (from 18% to 8%);
- In 2010, a higher proportion of both unionist and nationalist MLAs consider the PBNI to be 'effective' than in 2008, however, the rise was greater amongst unionist MLAs than nationalist MLAs.



What is the probation service in Northern Ireland set up to deliver?

In Question One MLAs were asked to comment on what they understand the probation service in Northern Ireland is set up to deliver. MLAs were given an open box in which to write their response. The idea was to gather some broad intelligence of MLAs' thoughts on the role and function of the probation service.

For analysis purposes, the responses have been categorised by political party.

Overall, the responses show a keenness from MLAs to write free hand on what they understand the probation service is set up to deliver. Only 12% of MLAs surveyed did not state anything as a response.

The responses show an understanding of the PBNI's work with offenders particularly in the community. The PBNI's role in the community is mentioned more often than when the same question was asked two years previously. There is also an understanding of the Probation Board's role in public protection.

Some MLAs continue to use language such as 'monitoring', 'supervising' and 'dealing with' offenders. Other MLAs choose to use language such as 'managing', 'helping' and 'rehabilitating' offenders.

The phrases that appeared most often in MLAs' description of the probation service in Northern Ireland were as follows:

- to prevent reoffending;
- to rehabilitate offenders;
- to protect the public;
- to monitor offenders;
- to resettle offenders
- to manage offenders;
- to help / assist offenders not to reoffend.

Table 1.1 below shows the full verbatim responses according to political party.

Table 1.1 - What is the probation service in Northern Ireland set up to deliver?

Party	Comment
DUP	<i>"Look after resettlement of offenders"</i>
	<i>"Helps to prevent offenders reoffending"</i>
	<i>"Mediate PSNI/criminals"</i>
	<i>"To manage offenders released from prison"</i>
	<i>"Rehabilitating criminals"</i>
	<i>"To supervise prisoner releases from custody. Provide supervision and training for convicts on bail"</i>
	<i>"Help prevent reoffending, help protect the public"</i>
	<i>"Working with offenders in a community environment outside prisons"</i>
	<i>"To monitor those released from prison under probation"</i>
	<i>"Helping to rehabilitate offenders and assist in reducing incidents of criminal re – offending"</i>
	Sinn Féin
<i>"To help ex offenders adapt, and to help them make a positive contribution to society, not to reoffend"</i>	
<i>"To provide courts with reports on the risk from offenders and assist offenders on release from prison"</i>	
<i>"Works with the courts, offenders and the judicial system"</i>	
<i>"To assist with the monitoring and rehabilitation of offenders"</i>	
<i>"Dealing with offenders who are put on probation"</i>	
UUP	<i>"Help for ex-prisoners/criminals/law breakers"</i>
	<i>"To hold offenders to accounts. If they do not adhere to their sentence the PBNi will implement enforcement action. At the same time the PBNi recognise that people can and do change, and they promote and encourage this"</i>
	<i>"To effectively and efficiently deal with those on probation"</i>
	<i>"To help prisoners effectively reintegrate into society"</i>
	<i>"Protect public and rehabilitate and resettle offenders"</i>
	<i>"Supervise offenders not in prison"</i>
	<i>"Helps to prevent reoffending, help with rehabilitation"</i>
SDLP	<i>"Probation Services"</i>
	<i>"To prevent crime through working with offenders"</i>
	<i>"Monitoring and assisting those released from prison"</i>
	<i>"Monitoring prisoners, help to resettle them back into the community"</i>
	<i>"Assistance to those on probation and ensure that they meet the terms of release"</i>
	<i>"An alternative to jail for offenders - training, etc"</i>
	<i>"Helps offenders not to re-offend. Supports offenders after release"</i>
	<i>"To prevent reoffending"</i>
	<i>"Resettlement of offenders"</i>
Alliance	<i>"Manages offenders rehabilitation and resettlement, protecting the community"</i>
	<i>"Resettle offenders"</i>
	<i>"Services for offenders, help with rehabilitation, reintegration, reducing recidivism"</i>
Other	<i>"Look after offenders"</i>

Question 2



How effective or otherwise are each of the following organisations at delivering services in Northern Ireland?

Police Service (PSNI)
Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJI)
Public Prosecution Service (PPS)
Probation Board (PBNI)
Prison Service (NIPS)
Youth Justice Agency (YJA)
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO)
The Consumer Council (CCNI)

Question Two assessed whether MLAs felt the Probation Board was an effective organisation in delivering services in Northern Ireland and compared these results with other organisations in the criminal justice sector. A comparison with the Consumer Council can also be made. The Consumer Council was included as a 'test option' as it is generally known as an organisation that MLAs consider to be effective.

Figure 2.1 below shows how MLAs rated the effectiveness of the Probation Board in delivering services:

Figure 2.1

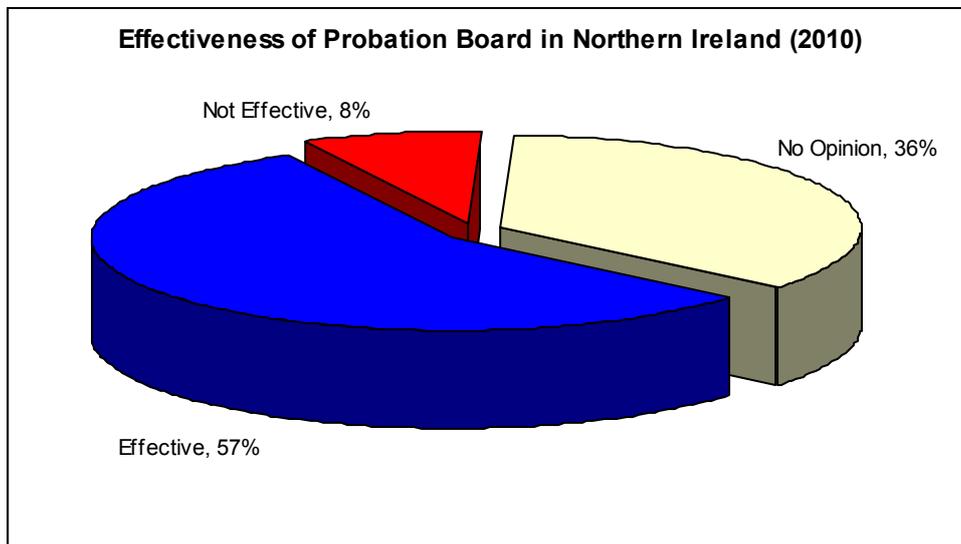
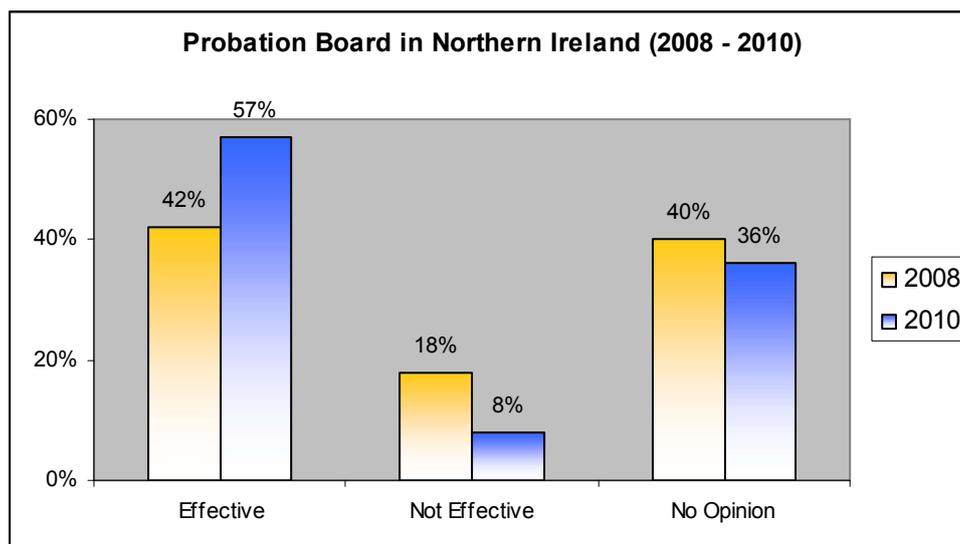


Figure 2.1 shows that a majority of MLAs surveyed (57%) rate the Probation Board as 'effective' in delivering services in Northern Ireland; this compares to 8% who stated 'not effective' and 36% who had 'no opinion'.

Figure 2.2 below compares the results of the same question asked in autumn 2008 to the question asked in autumn 2010.

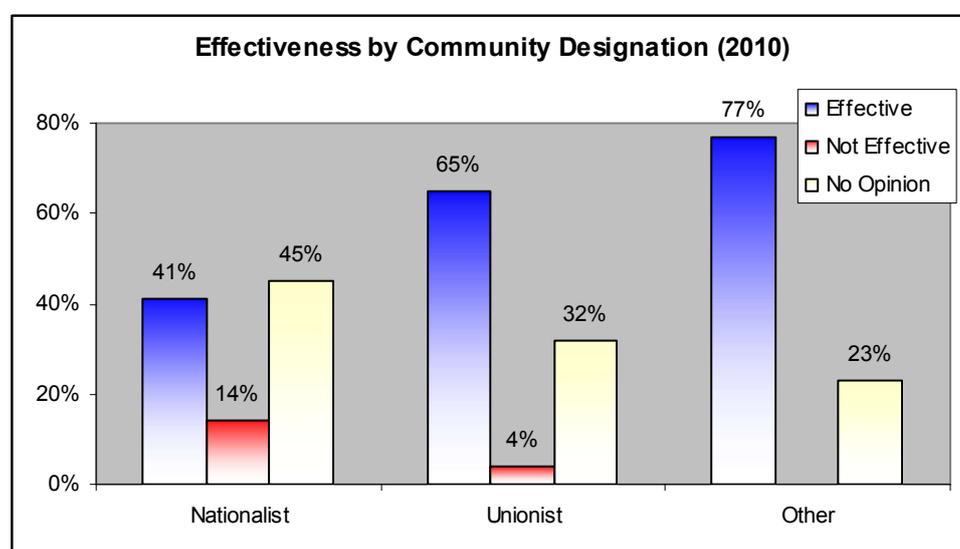
Figure 2.2



Over the past two years MLAs rating the PBNI as 'effective' at delivering services rose from 42% to 57%. MLAs who state that the PBNI is 'not effective' at delivering services fell from 18% to 8%. A large proportion of MLAs (36%) still have 'no opinion' on whether the PBNI is effective at delivering services. This fell slightly over the two year period from 40% to 36%.

Figure 2.3 below looks at the effectiveness of the Probation Board in 2010 according to community designation.

Figure 2.3



Here we can see that unionist MLAs (65%) are more likely to think that the organisation is 'effective' than nationalist MLAs (41%). 14% of nationalist MLAs stated that the organisation was 'not effective' compared to 4% of unionist MLAs. 77% of MLAs in the 'other' category, who define as neither nationalist nor unionist, rated the PBNI as 'effective'.

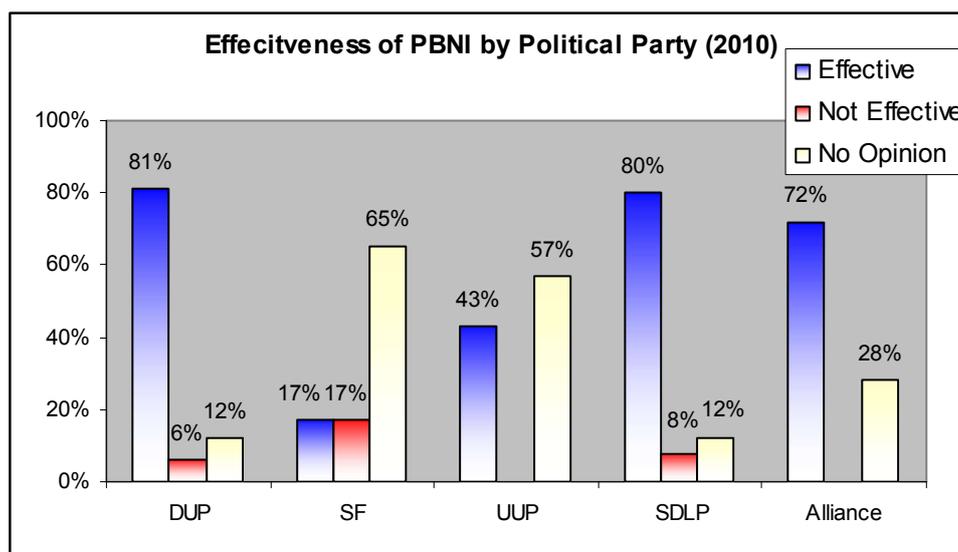
Compared to two years previous in 2008, the percentage of nationalist MLAs who rate the PBNI as 'effective' at delivering services rose from 29% to 41%. The percentage of nationalist MLAs who stated that the PBNI is 'not effective' fell from 30% to 14%. This shows that whereas in 2008, a greater percentage of nationalist

MLAs rated the PBNI as not effective, than effective, by 2010 this is no longer the case. Nationalist levels of 'no opinion' still remain high, rising from 41% in 2008 to 45% in 2010.

In 2008, 49% of unionist MLAs rated the PBNI as 'effective'. By 2010 this rose to 65%. Unionist MLAs who rated the PBNI as 'not effective' in 2008 stood at 12%, this fell to 4% by 2010. Levels of 'no opinion' amongst unionist MLAs fell slightly over the two year period, from 39% in 2008 to 32% in 2010.

Figure 2.4 below looks at the results for 2010 according to political party.

Figure 2.4



Here we can see that those parties with a majority of MLAs who think that the PBNI is 'effective' at delivering services are the DUP (81%), the SDLP (80%) and the Alliance Party (72%).

Sinn Féin MLAs largely stated that they had 'no opinion' (65%). This *could* indicate a considerable lack of awareness of the Probation Board within this party. It at least shows there is little definitive opinion either way from Sinn Féin on whether the Probation Board is effective.

Compared to 2008, the percentage of DUP MLAs rating the organisation as 'effective' rose from 52% to 81%. A similar rise can be seen in SDLP MLAs with 49% of MLAs rating the organisation as 'effective' in 2008 compared to 80% in 2010. Noticeably the results of Sinn Féin MLAs in 2010 did not change at all from 2008, with 17% still rating the organisation as 'effective', 17% stating the organisation is 'not effective' and 65% still having 'no opinion'.

So how does the Probation Board compare in comparison to other organisations?

Figure 2.5 below takes the Probation Board's 57% 'effectiveness rating' and compares it with the other organisations surveyed, both those in the criminal justice sector and the Consumer Council:

Figure 2.5



Here we can see that the Probation Board compares favourably to a number of other criminal justice organisations with a higher effectiveness rating than the Youth Justice Agency (53%), the Criminal Justice Inspectorate (49%), the Prison Service (49%), NIACRO (43%) and the Public Prosecution Service (35%).

The PBNI is not rated as effective in delivering services as the PSNI, which 77% of MLAs regarded as 'effective'.

Figure 2.6 below compares these results to those of two years previous when the same question was asked.

Figure 2.6

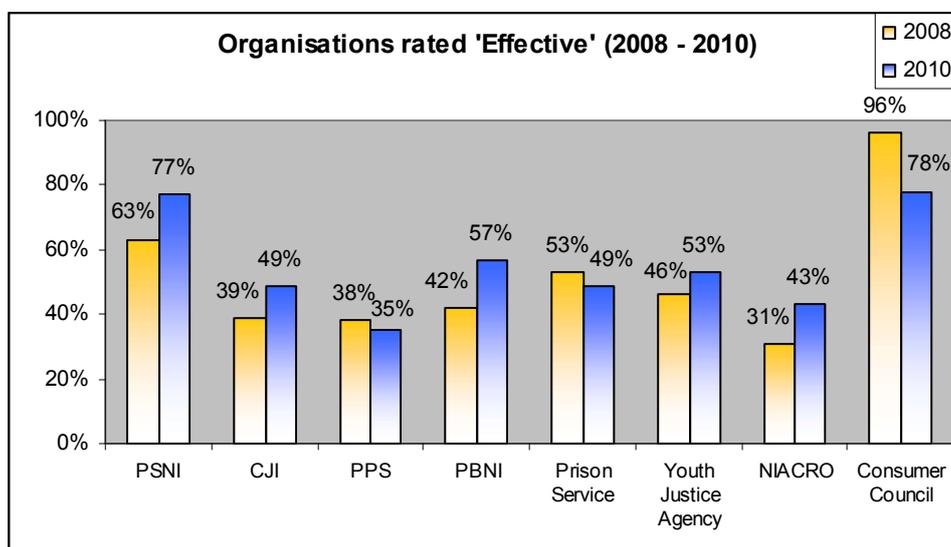


Figure 2.6 shows that a number of organisations received a higher effectiveness rating in 2010 from MLAs than in 2008. These organisations are the PSNI, the CJi, the PBNI, the Youth Justice Agency and NIACRO. The PPS, the Prison Service and the Consumer Council all had a lower percentage of MLAs rate the organisation as 'effective' in 2010 compared to 2008.

It should be noted that the greatest rise over the two years was in MLAs who rated the PBNI as 'effective'. From 2008 to 2010 this rose from 42% to 57%, a rise of

15%. This is compared to a 14% rise in the PSNI's rating (from 63% to 77%), a 12% rise in NIACRO's rating (from 31% to 43%) and a 10% rise in the CJI's rating (from 39% to 49%).



Please see the attached document for the full data tables.